A

Circular Letter

To the Clergy of Mary-Land, *Subsequent to the late Visitation.*

Reverend Brethren,

I cannot reflect upon the good Order of your Conferences, and the Unanimity in your Resolves at your late *Visitation*, without the greatest esteem of, and Affection towards you. And so happy a beginning gives me good Grounds to hope the best things from you. The truth of it is, when I sit down and consider the several particular Methods of *Ministerial Instruction*, which you did then so chearfully come into, I am not able, upon the most mature Deliberation, to conceive, what can be farther wanting on your Parts, to render the People committed to your Charge, fully edify'd in all things necessary to Salvation, but the putting the measures then Resolved upon, vigorously into Execution, both as to *Catechizing*, *Preaching*, and *Private Exhortation* and *Admonition*.

Now the first of your Resolutions refer to *Catechizing*; a part of your Ministry so exceedingly necessary in the Church of Christ, especially in an Age so loose in its Principles, as ours is, that enough can never be said to inculcate that matter upon you. But I forbear here, having so largely spoken to it in my *Visitation Charge*. However there is one consideration of such peculiar force to your selves in *Maryland*, that I must needs remind you thereof, to invigorate you in that Work, tho' I know the words themselves were so emphatical, and the occasion of them, must be so fresh in your Minds, that it will not be easy for you to forget them.

And was it so, that but few Months ago, the whole Province were in that Consternation, on the account of their Religion, as did far exceed our Expectation; And did the *Patriots* of your Country under such Difficulties, and Discouragements, as I forbear to name, renew its Establishment, and that too with such an *Unanimity*, and *general Consent*, as shews that it is no indifferent thing to them? And wherefore was it, that notwithstanding all, they would re-establish our Church, and provide for its Clergy amongst them; Why? For this end they declare they did this glorious Work! THAT THEIR CHILDREN AND POSTERITY BEING PRESERVED IN THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH, FROM FACTION AND SCHISM, IN HONESTY AND CHARITY, MIGHT BECOME GOOD AND SOBER MEN, LOVING VERTUE, HATING VICE, THE RATIONAL CONSEQVENCE OF TRUE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE. Words surely that deserve to be written (both for the perpetual Honour of the Province, and for a Memorandum to you of the Clergy, to what purpose you are continued) IN LETTERS OF GOLD on PILLARS OF MARBLE. It evidently appears hence, That the Christian Education of their Youth, is what those *Patriots* do chiefly expect from you. And surely then, if for this Reason principally, a Clergy have been there re-established, so far as lies in their Power: To this work therefore it is, That in a more especial manner, you are call'd to exert your Labours, as a most important part of your Ministry among them. And you are to conclude hence, That you, of all the Clergy in the King's Dominions, have a more than ordinary Call to apply your selves particularly thereunto.

And indeed the Catechetical part is Digeſted by you, ſo much to my Satisfaction, that if you ſhall marſhall all the Youth within your reſpective Cures into thoſe *Three Claſſes*, and ſhall Catechize them accordingly, I ſhould then hope very ſoon to ſee thoſe in *America*, as far exceed many amongſt us here, as the Children of the poor *Vaudois*, which *Thuanus* ſpeaks of, Lib. 27. do thoſe in the wealthier parts of the Chriſtian World. And the Religious Education of Youth, being a part of your Duty of ſuch infinite Conſequence, as well to the planting of Chriſtianity with you, as the Reſtauration of it here, now almoſt expiring amongſt us, I conjure you, by all that Love which the Son of God bore to the Sons of Men, when he deſcended from Heaven, to teach and enlighten the ignorant and benighted World; and which Love he particularly expreſſed to ſuch tender ones: I conjure you by all this, to *Feed thoſe Lambs*. And that there may be no impoſſibility, incapacity, or any want of means urg'd in excuſe for any one's omiſſion in that part, I have provided you with ſuch a quantity of Books, Adapted to thoſe ſeveral Degrees of *Catechumens*, as will ſupply all the poorer Children, at leaſtwiſe, in your reſpective Cures; and will alſo take care of even thoſe of better Condition, ſhould their Parents be ſo Barbarous towards them, as to deny to provide them with neceſſary Books, rather than they ſhall want *Catechetical Inſtruction*.

For the *Firſt Claſs*, you have, *The Church Catechiſm, together with ſome of the moſt Appoſite Texts pertaining to the ſeveral Doctrines, and Duties contained therein, with a Form of Morning and Evening Prayer for Children. Alſo, a Grace before and after Meat.* And of theſe I would have you give one to all the poorer Families, and to Servants Quarters within your reſpective Cures, where there are Children, and to recommend it to the welthier Parents to buy for theirs. And after this, let it be your Care to have the Children frequently call'd upon to repeat their Catechiſm, and to recite their Scriptures, and Prayers. Let this, I ſay, be done, either by your ſelves, when you ſhall viſit thoſe Families, or by others whom you ſhall intruſt to call them thus to account in your ſtead. And as you cannot think of ſuch proper Perſons for this purpoſe, as the Members of the *Religious Society*, or ſuperior *Claſs of Catechumens* within your Pariſhes, whom you will find very ſervicable to you in this, and many other good Offices within your Cures: So indeed this part muſt be done chiefly by ſome truſty Deputy, it being equally impoſſible, either that ſuch ſmall Children ſhould be brought many Miles to Church to be Catechiz'd, or that you ſhould be continually viſiting them at their Houſes for that purpoſe, for which more than your whole time would be inſufficient in ſuch dilated Cures. And it may ſuffice that you do this in Perſon only, when either a *Baptiſm*, or the *Viſitation* of the Sick, or a *Funeral*, or any other occaſion ſhall draw you out into any quarter of your Pariſh. Where a Competition between the ſeveral Duties of your *Paſtoral Office* is ſuch, that your time will be devoured by any one of them, to the omiſſion of others equally neceſſary, if you ſhould give your ſelves up wholly to that; there is a neceſſity, ſo far to diſpenſe with the *Perſonal* Execution thereof, as to reſerve a ſhare for other parts of your Function, And this I know is too much your Caſe.

The *Second Claſs* of Catechumens you have judiciouſly appointed to conſiſt of Children, between Nine and Thirteen: not that you are to tye up your ſelves ſo nicely between ſuch Periods, that a Child either under the one, or beyond the other is always to be excluded that inſtitution which you judge moſt proper for ſuch as are within that Compaſs: But becauſe it is to be expected, that as well *Chriſtian* Children, as thoſe of the *Jews*, ſhould by that time be able to give ſome Account, or *Reaſon of the Faith that is in them*. And it is of the greateſt uſe to fix deſigns to certain Periods, which will cauſe ſuch expectations, that, generally ſpeaking, things will anſwer within thoſe termes. And as you have *Reſolved*, with reſpect to this rank of *Catechumens*, to have them learn by Heart Some Expoſition with *Scripture Proofs*; ſo I have accordingly ſent you a ſufficient number of that Kind

This Book is divided into four parts, and ſubdivided into Fifty Two Leſſons; one for every Sunday in the Year; in which are explained the peculiar Terms in Divinity; and in which are given the Elements of Chriſtian Knowledge; both in the general Doctrine, and particular Articles of the Covenant of Grace. And it

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is in this manner, I think, that your Catechiſm ought to be Expounded to Young Children. For firſt, as to the terms in Divinity; *Theology*, as well as all other Sciences, has ſome peculiar Expreſſions, which till underſtood, render any Diſcourſe on Subjects of that Nature utterly unintelligible to either Hearers or Readers: And therefore the peculiar acceptations of ſuch words, ſo often occurring in our Diſcourſes of Religion, muſt be firſt explain'd to the Youth, as we would have them be ever Edify'd from the Desk, or from the Pulpit. And ſuch Expoſitions ought alſo to be ſo contrived, as to give the *Catechumen* a view of the Nature, Terms and Conditions of his Covenant with God. For Chriſtianity is no other than ſuch a Covenant. And the whole Texture of our *Church Catechiſm* is, according to the Analytical and beſt Method, both a general, and particular Inſtruction in that matter.

The *Third Claſs* of Catechumens, you would have to conſiſt of Youth grown up to ſome Years. And theſe you are for treating with in a manner ſomething more Manly than the very Children of Thirteen. You would not oblige them to get an Expoſition by Heart, but would recommend to them ſome proper Book to *Read*, but yet to Read ſo attentively, and with ſuch Application of Mind, as to be ſo much Maſters of its Senſe, as in Conference and Diſcourſe with you upon thoſe Subjects, to be able to give you Reaſon to conclude they underſtood what they have Read. And indeed hereby you will both lead them to exerciſe their own Judgments, a thing of ſingular uſe to them, and will alſo treat them in ſuch a manner (tho' it be in effect ſtill but Catechizing) as none will think themſelves above.

And it is moreover very judiciouſly *Reſolved* by you, to adviſe them more particularly to Read ſuch a Book, or Books, as ſhall more fully inſtruct them in the Nature, Terms and Conditions of the Covenant of Grace. To underſtand and comprehend which throughly, is to know the whole Tenor of Chriſtianity, and which, except it be conceived under ſuch a Scheme, cannot, in my Opinion, be ſo rightly and clearly apprehended. Beſides, theſe your *Catechetical Conferences* with them are primarily deſign'd to prepare them with proper Knowledge, that if *Adult*, and not yet Baptized (of which there are ſo many in the Plantations) they may be liſted to God in Baptiſm; or if they have been already Baptized, that they may ratify their *Baptiſmal Covenant* with God in the Lord's Supper. And therefore ſome more enlarged Diſcourſe upon the Nature, Terms and Conditions of their Covenant with God; ſuch as ſhall farther explain, what through ſhortneſs might be left obſcure in the former, muſt, I humbly conceive, be the moſt proper Book, which at firſt you can recommend to them: And then other Diſcourſes on Faith, or a good Life, ſuch as you will find in the *Layman's Library*, when that former is fully imbib'd, may be with greater advantage propos'd afterwards. Well, I think it my Duty to furniſh here alſo, ſuch of your Diſciples, at leaſt, as cannot provide themſelves; and therefore give you Commiſſion to take of Mr. *Jones* at *Annopolis*, as many of the *Short Diſcourſes upon the Baptiſmal Covenant*, as you ſhall want for the poorer Youth, both Children and Servants.

And becauſe that *Youth* when once they advance towards the State of Manhood, will ſoon out grow your Tuition, begin with them firſt: And, I beſeech you, with all expedition, to form out of ſuch amongſt them, as are grown up to Years of Diſcretion, a *Claſs* or *Society of Catechumens*, whom I would have you to Inſtruct and Direct according to the Methods, which you will find I have laid down at large in the Preface to my *Diſcourſe on the Baptiſmal Covenant*, to which I refer you. I call theſe your Young Diſciples, indifferently a *Religious Society*, or a *Claſs of Catechumens*. But ſince too many have ſuch ridiculous Prejudices (and it is indeed an amazing thing to conſider, how far ſome pitiful Prejudices do, in many Caſes, pervert the Minds of many wiſe and good Men from approving, or purſuing the beſt Deſigns) I ſay, ſince many are prejudiced againſt the word *Societies*, call them, if you pleaſe, *Catechumens*, being the antient Term of the Church of Chriſt, for theſe your Diſciples, and I defy any then to except againſt them; for I am ſure no good Man can gain-ſay, or oppoſe the *Thing*. For,

FIRST,

FIRST, It is moſt indiſpenſibly your Duty to call Young People together, and to give them proper and ſuitable Inſtructions, their Youthful Years being the very Critical time of engaging them firmly to God; for if left to themſelves at that Age, it is very great odds, but their natural Propenſity to Evil, which is then in the Highth, and the Allurements of bad Company, which are then moſt buſy, will Enter them, and bind them cloſe in the Service of the *Devil*, the *World*, and the *Fleſh*. And let any of you, as you are the Miniſters of Chriſt, and will anſwer it at the dreadful Tribunal, take heed how you let them alone then to themſelves to be the Slaves of Satan.

SECONDLY, It is highly expedient, that you ſhould, for their better Conduct, put them under ſome *prudential Rules*. And I do recommend to you, for that purpoſe, thoſe which you will find in the *Short View of the Religious Societies in and about London*, herewith ſent you, wherein you will ſee, that thoſe here in *England* have form'd to themſelves ſuch Rules as deſerve our higheſt Approbation: And, with ſome little Alterations, agreeable to the Circumſtances of your parts, you may regulate the matter with reference to the *Catechetical Societies* (for ſuch the *Religious Societies* ought all to be) with you in the *Plantations*.

THIRDLY, I do aſſert, That every Parochial Miniſter ought to be preſent with them at their Meetings, to Inſtruct, and to direct them what they are to Read; to examine them, in order to know their Improvements, to take care they do not warp towards Error or Schiſm, and to prevent Seducers from coming amongſt them.

The danger of the two latter, I know is all that thoſe who are the moſt prejudic'd, have to ſuggeſt againſt them. But whoſe fault is it, if their Clergy come not near them, tho' it ſhould be ſo, that they either warp of themſelves, or are ſeduc'd by others? (as the contrary is moſt evident) Nay, why then, with greater Reaſon, ſhould not every *Parochial Miniſter* be always preſent with, and preſide at their Religious Conferences. This, My Reverend Brethren, I do conjure you to do; and as I lay my Heart upon no one thing ſo much, as your forming theſe *Catechetical Societies* within your reſpective Cures, as the only means to train up a better Generation, than the wretched one, now in being; ſo having found the extent of your Pariſhes to be vaſtly too large to have all ſuch Youth meet you at one place, whether at the Church, or elſewhere, I deſire you to quarter out your larger Pariſhes into as many Diſtricts as you ſhall find neceſſary for their convenient Meeting together, and to appoint ſo many ſeveral Days and Places for em to meet you (every Sunday in the Afternoon at Church, being always one of your Days and Places;) and this, if you ſhall do, tho' I have ſeem'd in the following Catalogue to provide only Books for one, or two of thoſe Claſſes in each of your Pariſhes, yet you ſhall not want the like number of Books for as many *Catechetical Societies* as you ſhall be able to raiſe. And the Good God, to the terror of Satan, and all his Adherents, ſucceed you in theſe your Labours, and Endeavours.

To Second you in which, I have ſent you a *Paſtoral Letter*, *perſwading Youth both to an early Entertainment of Religion; and, in order to that, to put themſelves under the Conduct of their reſpective Miniſters*. And as I would have you to give theſe Letters into the Hands of the moſt ſerious Youth in your Pariſhes, and ſuch as are likelieſt to be influenc'd by them, in order to form them into ſuch a *Claſs* or *Society of Catechumens*; ſo I beſeech you to apply to them to this purpoſe by theſe Letters, with all poſſible Expedition, leaſt that one of theſe poor Souls, for want of our ſecuring him to God betimes, be pre-engaged to the *Powers of Darkneſs*.

And becauſe I am abſolutely of your Opinion, that could you procure ſome skilful Perſon in the Country, to teach your *Catechumens* to ſing the Pſalms Artificially, as ſet to the moſt approved Tunes (and Mr. *N.*——*S.* and Mr. *T.*——*P.* being both skilful in Church-Muſick, will ſoon train you up one, or two Maſters for the purpoſe) the Entertainments of *Pſalmody*, eſpecially according

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to the *New Version*, would wonderfully invite the Young People both to enter into a *Catechetical Society*, and would charm them into a conſtant attendance on it. I would therefore have you make it part of your Buſineſs at thoſe Meetings of the Youth, to have them firſt taught to Sing by Note, and then afterwards, I would have you both open, and cloſe up your *Catechetical Conferences* with a Pſalm. This is, with St. *Paul*, *to Catch them by Guile*; and I am ſure will be an *innocent* and *unſinful pious Fraud*. And as for the Pſalms themſelves, you have a ſufficient *Directus* for your purpoſe to begin with, at the end of the *Baptiſmal Covenant*. And I will take care to ſend you a more compleat Collection afterwards.

And when, upon the whole, you ſhall hereby have train'd up a conſiderable number of the Youth of your Pariſhes, to a very good pitch of Knowledge, and ſhall have ſeaſoned them by your Religious Diſcourſes with them, and Pious Directions given them; ſo that they become both Knowing and Devout Chriſtians; immediately upon that, I beſeech you, according to your laſt *Reſolution* upon this Head, to appoint your *Monthly Sacraments*, and to make it your ſpecial Care to have all the *Catechumens of the Superiour Claſs*, conſtant Communicants. Hereby your Youth will be happily pre-engaged in the Service of God. And from them, you will be always ſure to have Gueſts at the Lords Table. And if you can inſtruct and prepare ſome of the poorer *Negroes* ſo far, as that they may joyn in Communion with you at the Supper of the Lord (as our Brother Mr. *Colbatch* has ſo worthily done) methinks the Diverſity of Complections will add a Beauty to the Spiritual Entertainment: And it may rejoyce our very Hearts to behold Minds ſo enlighten'd, in Bodies ſo Dark.

The remaining part of your Viſitation Acts relate to *Preaching*, to *private Application*, and to ſuch Methods of *Diſcipline*, as are moſt neceſſary to be maintained among your ſelves.

And I ſhall, at my firſt Leiſure, reflect likewiſe upon thoſe Parts ſucceſſively, in the ſame manner as here. I ſay, in the ſame manner as here; for I ſhall not offer to *lay heavy Burthens upon you, and not touch them with one of My Fingers*, but as with Relation to the Catechizing of all the degrees of Youth, Care ſhall be taken to furniſh you with *Catechiſms* and *Expoſitions* for them; ſo with reference to the two remaining Parts, I ſhall induſtriouſly endeavour to provide you with ſuch neceſſary helps, as I can poſſibly contrive, that ſo there may be no want of means to any of you to Execute the moſt difficult of all your *Reſolutions*, and nothing to urge in Excuſe as to the impracticableneſs of any one of thoſe Particulars, you have ſo well, ſo much becomming your Function *Reſolved* upon; For this you may aſſure your ſelves, that I am, as,

Reverend Sirs,

Your moſt Affectionate Brother,

ſo your Faithful Fellow-Labourer,

Thomas Bray.

Curſus Catecheticus
AMERICANUS.

Conſiſting of Books more particularly fitted for the Uſe of the Three ſeveral Claſſes of Catechumens, in order to ſeaſon the growing Generation with the Principles of Piety and Virtue: Purſuant to the Reſolutions made to that purpoſe the Second Day of the Viſitation in Mary-Land, May *the* 4th. 1700.

I. *For the Firſt Claſs of Catechumens conſiſting of Children under the Age of Nine.*

THE *Church-Catechiſm: Together with ſome of the moſt Appoſite Texts pertaining to the ſeveral Doctrines and Duties contained therein; with a Form of Morning and Evening Prayer for Children. As alſo, a Grace before and after Meat.*—20

Theſe to be given to ſo many as will make a Claſs.

II. *For the Second Claſs of Catechumens*

An Expoſition of the Church-Catechiſm, with Scripture-Proofs fitted for the ſecond Claſs of Catechumens in the Plantations: Divided into four Parts; and ſubdivided into 52 Leſſons, one for every Sunday in the Year, in which are explain'd the peculiar Terms in Divinity: And in which are given the Elements of Chriſtian Knowledge, both in the General Doctrine, and Particular Articles of the Covenant of Grace.——————20

Theſe to be lent to ſo many as will make a Claſs.

III. *For the Third Claſs, or the Society of Catechumens to be fitted for the Bleſſed Sacrament, either of Baptiſm, if Adult, or the Lord's Supper, if formerly Baptiz'd.*

Preparative to the forming, and engaging of which Catechetical Society,

A Paſtoral Letter from a Miniſter, addreſs'd to the Young Perſons of his Pariſh, ſhewing them the Neceſſity and Advantage of an early Religion; in order to perſwade the Youth of each Pariſh in the Plantations to enter themſelves into a Religious Society of Catechumens, under the Conduct of their reſpective Miniſters.—20.

Theſe to be put into the hands of the moſt ſerious Youth in a Pariſh, in order to form them into ſuch a Claſs, or Society of Catechumens.

And to which is added the better to engage them to meet at ſuch Catechetical Conferences,

An Introduction of the New Verſion of Pſalms into General Uſe both in Families, and Churches; being a ſufficient Collection of ſuch, as are proper to be ſung in either. Set to the moſt approv'd Tunes which are in uſe.——————20

Theſe to be ſung both at the beginning and end of the Conference.

And then for the proper Inſtruction of theſe Perſons,

A Short Diſcourſe in the Doctrine of our Baptiſmal Covenant, proper to be read by all Young Perſons, in order to their underſtanding the whole Frame and Tenour of the Chriſtian Religion; and to their being duly prepared for Confirmation, with Devotions preparatory to that Apoſtolick and Uſeful Ordinance.——————20

Common Prayers.——————20

Theſe to be lent to the ſuperiour Claſs of Catechumens, during the time they ſhall attend upon their Catechetical Conferences, That they may be then throughly directed by the Miniſters reſpectively, in the Uſe of the Common Prayer, *purſuant to what has been propos'd in that Matter, in the Preface to the Diſcourſe on the Baptiſmal Covenant.*

FINIS.